United Nations A/HRC/29/NGO/3

General Assembly

Distr.: General
3 June 2015

English only

Human Rights Council
Twenty-ninth session
Agenda item 4
Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain Inc, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[19 May 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.15-11186 (E)
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Kingdoms of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia Should End Human Rights Violations

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, an organization in consultative status with UN-ECOSOC, would like to use the occasion of the 29th Session of the Human Rights Council to call attention to the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's continued violations of both human and civil rights. In the past few months, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain have acted to increase limits on free speech and freedom of expression while simultaneously engaging in policies of systematic torture and repression.

The human rights situation in Bahrain continues to deteriorate as the government maintains oppressive laws, erasing political dissent and further shrinking the space in which civil society may function. These laws include, the 2002 Press Law, which allows Bahrain to arrest and imprison journalists who criticize the king, and a 2014 libel law, which criminalizes any insult against the king, limit the opportunity for true political discourse. The anti-terrorism law, an amendment of which passed late last year, gives government security officers the power to persecute acts of political dissent in an ostensible fight against terrorism. A 2013 law banned all protests throughout all of Bahrain, and authorities continue to arrest political leaders, journalists and activists in relation to such demonstrations. In December 2014, Bahraini officials utilized the country's oppressive legal system to arrest Sheikh Ali Salman, the leader of the opposition party *al-Wefaq*, on charges of inciting hatred against the government and engaging in illegal protest. He remains in prison amid numerous trial delays. Authorities also arrested Hussain Jawad, a human rights defender and protest organizer, in February, charging him with "collecting money from abroad and Bahrain to aid and abet saboteurs." Mr. Jawad, still in prison awaiting trial, claims that he has suffered physical and psychological torture in captivity.

In April, Bahraini authorities brought new charges against Nabeel Rajab, a prominent Bahraini human rights defender, the president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR), and Deputy Secretary General of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH). A constant target of government persecution, Rajab was arrested in October after returning from the 27th Session of the Human Rights Council. In January, a Bahraini court sentenced Mr. Rajab to six months imprisonment for "insulting a government institution" after tweeting news of former Bahraini security officers joining ISIS. Mr. Rajab is under a travel ban during his appeal process, which Bahraini courts have delayed several times. On 2 April, Bahraini authorities arrested Mr. Rajab once more, charging him with posting "information that could incite others and disrupt civil peace" and "illegally defaming a statutory body" after he published tweets condemning violent attacks on inmates in Jaw Prison and criticizing Bahrain's involvement in the war in Yemen. Facing up to 10 years in prison for these two tweets, Bahraini authorities have kept Mr. Rajab in solitary confinement, where he currently awaits his trial.

While recent cases like Mr. Rajab's may be at the forefront of the conversation surrounding Bahrain's arbitrary detentions, many persons arrested after the protests in 2011 remain in prison and continue to face ill treatment and poor living conditions. The Bahrain 13, a group of prominent activists, human rights defenders medical professionals, teachers, and religious and political leaders, continue to suffer in prison, all claiming torture and ill treatment at the hands of Bahraini prison authorities. Bahraini courts sentenced the Bahrain 13 on charges that related to speech and political assembly, and condemned seven of the individuals to life in prison for "plotting to topple the government." One of those serving a life sentence, human rights defender and blogger Dr. Abduljalil Singace, recently began a hunger strike to protest poor prison conditions and severe overcrowding. Dr. Singace, who suffers partial paralysis from polio as well as other health complications, has been denied appropriate medical care, and his health continues to deteriorate.

Bahraini prisons continue to be the site of substantial human rights abuses. In responding to a 10 March prison riot over the effects of overcrowding and over-incarceration, Bahraini authorities engaged in the excessive use of force, allegedly attacking prisoners with rubber bullets, tear gas, and shotguns. Several of the attacks appear to have taken place in buildings that house minors, and leaked photos from the prison display numerous injuries to the prisoners, many of which required immediate medical attention. Afterwards, prison authorities placed prisoners in small outdoor tents and

denied them access to toilets and showers for days. They took many of the inmates to Building 10, where they engaged in mass beatings and torture. In the time since the initial assault, prisoners continue to allege that Jau prison staff has maintained a policy of systematic torture and abuse. Authorities have yet to conduct an independent investigation into the events of 10 March, and group and individual punishment reportedly continues.

In February 2012, Bahrain established the Office of the Ombudsman for the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) with the objective of ensuring that employees of the Bahraini MOI interacted with the public and with prisoners in a manner that is respectful of human rights. While the Ombudsman is meant to curtail human rights abuses perpetrated by MOI employees, evidence suggests that the office has actively worked to perpetuate abusive practices. Over the last few months, ADHRB has received reports that government security forces have engaged in acts of retaliatory abuse and torture against persons that complain to the Office of the Ombudsman. ADHRB's own investigations into the Ombudsman's activities reveal an organization complicit in human rights abuses and consistently unwilling to investigate reports of government misconduct.

Saudi Arabia has similarly escalated state-sponsored repression, significantly increasing its use of capital punishment to punish dissent. In October 2014, a Saudi court sentenced Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a prominent peaceful opposition activist, to death on charges of fomenting dissent and disloyalty to the government. Saudi authorities additionally convicted Raif Badawi, a Saudi blogger who wrote about respecting differences in religion and opinion, for "insulting Islam", and sentenced him to 10 years imprisonment and 1,000 lashes. Independent observers believe that Badawi will die if his sentence is fully implemented.

The Saudi criminalization of dissent has had a deleterious effect on the health of civil society in the country. In March 2013, Saudi authorities forcibly closed the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association, imprisoning eight members of the group on charges including "questioning the integrity of officials" and "breaking their allegiance." Saudi courts sentenced Waleed Abu al-Khair, the head of Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia, to 15 years imprisonment for, among other charges, "inciting public opinion" and "insulting the judiciary." Many women's rights activists in Saudi Arabia are also targeted for advocating against the male guardianship law, which prohibits women from marriage, divorce, and travel without permission from a male guardian. In December 2014, in retaliation against her peaceful advocacy for human rights in the Human Rights Council, the Saudi Ministry of the Interior issued a travel ban on activist Samar Badawi. She has yet to be able to leave the country.

The Kingdoms of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia have failed to make any progress in recognizing and observing human rights. We therefore call on the international community to expose and address the persistent human rights abuses present in these countries. We hope that the international community's renewed and continued pressure will encourage the governments of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia to implement meaningful reforms and end their campaigns of violence against peaceful demonstrations of dissent.